

REEL CRITIQUE

MOVIE REVIEWS

The Thin Red Line

Starring: Sean Penn and Nick Nolte
Directed by Terrance Malick
Playing at Hollywood 16



Sean Penn stars as Sgt. Welsh in the war drama *The Thin Red Line*.

The *Thin Red Line* does not end with a climactic battle. It does not have a point-of-view character or protagonist. It does not have a compelling, linear plot. This is why *The Thin Red Line* will miss most audiences.

After a 20-year, Garbo-esque exile, Malick's return to filmmaking is among the most well-photographed, yet elusive films of the era.

The movie is loosely based on James Jones' novel *From Here to Eternity* and is the story of Charlie Company during the battle of Guadalcanal during World War II.

Think of *The Thin Red Line* not as a movie but as a visual poem. The cinematography is breathtaking, but the film, like Malick's last movie, 1978's *Days of Heaven*, is emotionally distant.

The Thin Red Line is a combination of several different voice-overs playing the film together. At times

Malick creates a remarkable picture, similar to the power and madness of *Apocalypse Now*, but *Line* often feels disjointed and jumpy.

Even though the film is nearly three hours long, it could have benefitted from either a lengthening (some characters are needlessly thrown into the mix, especially George Clooney's ridiculous and gratuitous appearance near the end of the movie) or a drastic shortening. Far too often the film recites philosophical voice-over after voice-over that become stale. Consequently, *The Thin Red Line* feels

too arty and pretentious.

This film will undoubtedly be compared to *Saving Private Ryan*, but the two are completely different.

Spielberg's film, although clichéd, pushes audiences' buttons and gets them involved, whereas Malick's pushes viewers away.

Despite the weakness of *Line*, it doesn't bow to the almighty emotion and moves in unexpected directions that make it superior to *Ryan*. (Grade: B+)

— Jeff Schmidt

Varsity Blues

Starring James Van Der Beek and Jon Voight
Directed by Brian Robbins
Playing at Hollywood 16

The backup quarterback who comes in to relieve the injured star quarterback has become a cliché in Hollywood. Although *Varsity Blues* is directed with the subtlety and pacing of a TV commercial (it's an MTV production), the movie is mildly entertaining.

It is the story of Mox (Van Der Beek), an intellectual who would rather read *Vonnegut* than his playbook. When the team's Florida State-committed quarterback (Paul Walker) is hurt during a game, Mox takes over and becomes the hero of his small West Texas town.

West Canaan is the type of town many Texans will be familiar with: life revolves around football

and the head coach, Kilmer (Voight), is a town demagogue. Even the team's hats say Kilmer's Coyotes. Kilmer is obsessed with winning his 23rd district title and when his team blows a game, he spouts, "You cost me my perfect season!"

Mox is laid back, and this creates conflict between him and his high-strung coach, resulting in a reverse Latrell Sprewell (coach chokes player) and obligatory last-second win.

Van Der Beek clearly picked this part to distance himself from the lovesick Dawson on "Dawson's Creek." Mox is not exactly a nice guy; he gets drunk and goes to strip clubs. Van Der Beek is playing with his dark side, perhaps in an attempt to land more roles. Van Der Beek's performance has been compared to that of Tom Cruise in *All the Right Moves*.

Do not expect *Varsity Blues* to win any awards. Let it be what it wants to be, entertainment, and it will be worth the ride. (Grade: C+)

— Jeff Schmidt

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